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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study of the perceptions of 10 teachers as they sought to gain acceptance for curriculum practices considered to be child-responsive. The teachers worked with 5- and 6-year-old children in schools where some perceived their child-responsive practices as innovative, introducing practices which differed from those already institutionalized in the school. The transactional nature of the curriculum implementation process is illuminated through narrative accounts constructed with the teachers. Collaborative efforts were made to understand and explain the complexities of using ideals to inform practice within the everyday routines for living in the workplace. The inquiry resulted in narratives which focus on dilemmas commonly faced by the teachers and on personal images orientating action in situations where dilemmas arise. It is argued that the constructs of teacher dilemmas and teacher images provide useful foci for reflexively examining everyday experiences in deciding the curriculum. Through use of these constructs, teachers and student-teachers may achieve greater insight into the practical world of teachers' work, where images of self in social relationships enter into decisions made about how to act to gain acceptance for practices associated with educational ideals. (Contains approximately 45 references.) (Author/LL)

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Dilemmas and Images: Knowing How to Gain Acceptance for Child-responsive Practices.

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study of perceptions of experiences in gaining acceptance for curriculum practices the participating teachers considered to be 'child-responsive'. The teachers worked with five and six year old children in schools where some perceived their child-responsive practices as innovation, the introduction of practices which differed from those already institutionalised in the school. The transactional nature of the curriculum implementation process is illuminated through narrative accounts constructed with the teachers. Collaborative efforts were made to understand and explain the complexities of using ideals to inform practice within the everyday routines for living in the work place. The inquiry resulted in narratives which focus on dilemmas commonly faced by the teachers and on personal images orientating action in situations where dilemmas arise. It is argued that the constructs of teacher ***dilemmas*** *and teacher* ***images*** *provide useful focii for reflexively examining everyday experiences in deciding the curriculum. Through using these constructs, teachers and student-teachers may achieve greater insight into the practical world of teachers' work, where images of self in social relationships enter into decisions made about how to act to gain acceptance for practices associated with educational ideals.*

The teachers of young children who volunteered to take part in this collaborative inquiry into curriculum practice worked within a school system where early childhood curriculum approaches had been promoted in system policies for some fifteen years. Throughout those years there were recurring complaints from teachers about difficulties encountered in attempting to implement, in the schools where they worked, approaches which featured learner choice and shared responsibility for learning (Halliwell 1981, 1991; Ashby 1986).

Reactions to the difficulties varied. Too many experienced early childhood teachers resigned from the system rather than submit to what they perceived to be insurmountable constraints on their efforts to teach in the ways they valued. Others perceived themselves to be putting their ideals to one side and adopting practices already institutionalised in the places where they worked. Similar variations in reactions have been noted in other studies of teachers coping with work places expectations and routines (Lacey 1977; Denscombe 1980; Pollard 1980; Woods 1981; Zeichner, Tabanick and Densmore 1987; Anderson 1989)). Lacey concluded that teachers choose strategies which enable them to maintain a personal teaching identity while coping with structural regularities in the work place.

There were always a few teachers in the school system where this inquiry took place whose actions suggested they were attempting to re-define what was acceptable practice for the particular time, place and group of people involved. These teachers appeared to maintain a personal teaching identity through, as Woods (1981, p.282) has put it, "oscillating, twisting and turning" to bring their ideals and the expectations of others into acceptable alignments. These efforts very often resulted in classrooms where, not only did children share responsibility and work cooperatively in the classroom, but parents and other stakeholders supported these practices.

Much research into teacher reactions to the social demands of schools and classrooms has identified the existence of teachers who choose to follow their personal work paths,

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"outliers" in the social group (Anderson 1989) , "people taking a proactive orientation and seeking out experiences which would support, maintain, and enhance belief systems" (Smith, Kleine, Prunty and Dwyer 1986, p.290). Few studies have sought theoretical insight into what it is these teachers know which enables them to perceive possibilities where others perceive insurmountable constraint. As Cole has noted, there is very little research into the "problem of explaining how individuals with an innovatory orientation cope with structures which are generally regarded as particularly resistant to change" (1985, p.101).

Working With Teachers to Explain Practice

Achieving insight into the knowledge that teachers with a proactive orientation bring to the task of gaining acceptance for child-responsive practices was the aim of this study. The study was designed to establish contact with teachers who perceived themselves to be actively pursuing efforts to improve the curriculum for five and six year old children.

Circulars were sent to all schools in one geographic region of a state school system inviting participation. Over the year in which data were accumulated, the researcher listened to discourse in some twenty regional meetings where teachers voiced their curriculum concerns. Contact with a large number of teachers provided access to many perceptions of desirable practices. This contact provided an introduction to the structures of authority and the cultural norms operating in the region.

Ten teachers agreed to take part in reflective conversations about their experiences and up to six visits were made to each of their classrooms. Some joined in a series of after-school group discussions which became an important part of the cycle of re-viewing experience away from the particulars of everyday action. Regular contact with this group of teachers provided conditions where it was possible to share perceptions on experiences in promoting what we came, towards the end of our year of collaborative inquiry, to refer to as *child-responsive* practices.

Two of those taking part in the group meetings, Kate and Wendy, agreed to collaborative inquiry involving weekly contact (over 30 visits to each teacher) during the year. These two teachers were starting in new teaching situations where they expected they would manage to gain acceptance for the practices they valued. The indepth reflection on their experiences resulted in new insights into how social knowledge enters into the ways teachers manage their teaching dilemmas.

As I came to know the ten teachers who collaborated in this study, my perception was that these were people who "create new possibilities, build paths into regions that have never been explored before" (Connell 1985, p.206). The teachers would probably have found the description too extravagant, for they perceived their actions to be circumspect and cautious, taken with awareness that there could be unintended and undesirable consequences to being too different. These teachers, like those in other recent studies (Ellsworth 1989; Anderson 1989; Brennan 1989), engaged in complex transactional decision making processes. Observable action, though, was much less dramatic than implied in theories which highlight emancipatory ideals but ignore the practicalities of using these ideals within ongoing knowledge and power structures.

It was accepted that each participating teacher would have a personal research agenda as well as the collective aim of achieving theoretical insights about practical experience. At the beginning of our work together few of the participants were able to voice personal goals, though there was explicit recognition that benefits accrue when practitioners with similar ideals and similar interests talk together about day-to-day decision making concerns. By the end of the study, teachers claimed that this collaborative process resulted in new ways of understanding the circumstances in which they acted and increased ability to identify possibilities for acting within those circumstances.

They also claimed that the collaborative nature of our research relationship fitted very well with their ideals. Woven into images associated with child-responsive practices were visions of a society where people relate as equals, accepting and supporting one another in ways which contribute to the collective good. They knew how important were webs of relationships among trusted colleagues (Nias 1987; Halliwell 1992a) if they were to maintain their identity as the teachers they wanted to be, when they deliberately set out to act differently from the norms of their work place. Our collaboration came to be viewed as a new strand spun into these webs.

Constructing Perspectives on Practice

Underlying the inquiry were assumptions derived from Giddens' theory of social structuration (1984). Giddens highlights the need for research which focuses on what the individual brings into those intersections where personal goals are in contact with ongoing social structures, in order to understand the processes through which change is effected.

Following Giddens, it was assumed that individuals know a great deal about the circumstances in which they act and that personal motives influence how knowledge is used to inform action. But, according to Giddens, social knowledge is held at different levels of consciousness - discursive, practical and the unconscious. Knowledge held discursively is readily accessed through surveys, coded interview schedules and unstructured interviews (provided the respondent is motivated to answer the questions asked). But much of the knowledge that informs practical decision making is not held in discursive forms.

New methodologies have been developed in recent years in the search for understanding of knowledge held in practical consciousness. These are methodologies which bring the researcher into contact with the places where knowledge is activated, with the circumstances in which decisions are made and with teacher ways of knowing about having to make choices and act within the immediacy of a particular time, place and set of relationships.

Ethnographic case study methods provided a starting point in this study. Progressively shifting the focus from questions and concepts used by the outsider to meanings in use among insiders gradually added to understanding about the culture of the work places of these teachers (Reid 1978; Stake 1978; McCutcheon 1981). The study sought more than an account of life within a cultural group, rather, it sought insight into knowledge used when striving to improve the curriculum. Narrative methodologies (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; 1990) proved to be particularly important in establishing a cycle of observing, talking and writing which gradually filtered practical knowledge into discursive forms where it was more accessible to reflexive analysis.

Following the work of others, participant observation in classrooms, conversations (Yonemura 1982), diary writing (Holly 1984) and group discussions (Lampert 1981) provided access to situations and meanings of relevance to the study aims.

It was also considered important to tap into basic patterns in practitioner ways of knowing about teaching experience (Olson 1980; Yinger 1987) as a starting point to finding out how teachers brought social knowledge into their curriculum work. This was no easy task for little is known about what these patterns might be and there was always the danger of " 'dumping' on the teachers by imposing one's more 'enlightened' view of the situation" (Elbaz 1987, p.47). As the cycle of observing, talking and writing progressed, considerable attention was given to seeking out or generating constructs which fitted the ways teachers express knowledge about practice.

Creating a Language of Practice

The constructs of teacher *dilemmas* and teacher *images* became integral to our inquiries, helping achieve new insights into knowledge brought to practical problems. These two constructs were brought into the deliberations by the researcher, alongside other concepts which might have had utility in talking about practice. They remained because they became integral to our discourse where other concepts did not.

Teachers very quickly saw connections between their perceptions of their work experiences and Lampert's (1981; 1985) portrayal of teachers as dilemma managers. When I visited a classroom, a participating teacher was quick to point out situations where dilemmas arose and to engage in reflective conversations about why some dilemmas arose time and time again. In group discussions, away from the immediacy of the particulars of a time and place, we examined patterns occuring at those intersections where dilemmas recurred, noting how frequently conflict could be discerned between their ideals and dominant structural features of teachers' worlds of work.

These teachers knew about a world of work where competing imperatives, contradictions and ambiguities were endemic to making decisions. This is a way of understanding practical work that has been noted in many studies of the cultural dimensions of teachers' work (Jackson 1968; Doyle and Ponder 1977). The teachers knew too that making the best decision possible in the given circumstances meant accepting the likelihood of unwanted consequences, for there was never one "correct" decision to be made (Berlak and Berlak 1981; Alexander 1988).

The notion that practitioners hold knowledge in very personalised coalescences of meaning, referred to as *images* in the theory of personal practical knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin 1988) also engaged their attention. They identified easily with the notion that significant episodes from the past were caught up in these coalescences alongside meanings derived from teacher education courses and many other sources. Of particular interest was the proposition that images were activated by practical situations, that situations activated knowledge which was embodied in the person, emotional, aesthetic and moral elements caught up with physical acts and cognitive judgements (Johnston 1989). This way of understanding how practical knowledge is held engendered relief and satisfaction in the participating teachers. They could see a potentially useful tool for reflexively examining self as teacher, for examining how seemingly disparate meanings they knew to be important to them were implicated in their decision making.

As this year of data accumulation proceeded, narrative unities developed around these two constructs of **dilemmas** and **images**. Group narratives encapsulated a collective view on acting within the social world of work. Narratives constructed with Kate and Wendy illuminated how social knowledge caught up in images orientates action.

Teachers Picturing Themselves at Work

An unexpected outcome of the effort to work collaboratively was the genre emerging as the group constructed shared meanings for dilemma experiences. Anecdotes involving dilemmas were told with all the emotion, humour, ironic comment and even visual representation so typical of discourse among trusted colleagues. These tales told much about how these teachers understood their world of work and themselves as actors in these worlds. The humour and metaphoric forms seemed much too flippant for theory generated in the traditions of the social sciences. Yet ignoring these ways of communicating what was known about the social milieu of work denied an important facet of our efforts to bring practical knowledge into consciousness, available for personal reflection and shared understanding.

Now the researcher faced a dilemma, as she considered the move from discourse among a group of trusted colleagues to discourse in the public, academic domain. It was a dilemma other researchers have faced.

Researchers can so easily appropriate and twist the meanings held by practitioners (Elliott 1990). Hamilton (1989) notes the proliferation of qualitative studies of schoolroom life which do not speak to practitioners, which ignore the opportunity to connect with the lived experience of teachers in favour of forms of discourse more familiar to scholars and administrators. In moving away from the commonsense meanings of the practitioner, researchers, academics and administrators run the risk of being irrelevant in the sites where they seek to influence action (Mills 1959, p.138).

The proposition that teachers lead "storied lives"(Egan, 1986; Jackson, 1990; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) began to take on more meaning as I wrestled with this problem of what to do with a particular narrative which graphically captured teachers' knowledge about gaining acceptance for valued practices. The narrative which had emerged through our group discourse provided us with a "story", a generalisation about what was involved in deciding the curriculum. It was heartening to encounter again in my reading that:

> ... all social research is a form of storytelling, the creation of a narrative to help us 'make sense' of puzzling circumstances, or to make new sense out of situations we have come to take for granted. Thus, the methods of research and the disciplinary roots from which they sprout, are strategies for spinning tales that are simultaneously persuasive to one's audience and grounded in a disciplined way of knowing about the world.
>
> Shulman 1984, p.196

Remembering that many social scientists consider it necessary to account for all the data when constructing grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) it seemed that the humour, metaphor and visual representation that became part of our way of building a practical theory about teachers' work had to be communicated in the findings of this study.

Thus, in the first major presentation of findings a drawing which had engendered much amusement and impassioned discussion among the group was featured. This visual representation captured metaphoric references commonly used among teachers and wove them into a tale about using knowledge to chart a path around boulders (dilemmas) in the quest for acceptance of valued practices. Practitioners in this first audience identified very readily with the theory presented in this fashion, though some administrators and academics found it puzzling. Invitations from practitioner groups to repeat the presentation soon flowed in and in every forum where the "story" was told, impassioned discussion about dilemmas always followed.

It was clear that the use of metaphor, humour and visual representation assisted practitioners to "find their voice" to feel able to talk about the complexities, the ambiguities and the triumphs of pursuing their ideals within the places where they worked.

An extensive extract from that paper (Halliwell 1992, pp.33-36) is provided over the next two and one-half pages, to convey something of the metaphoric flavour and colour in the practical knowledge these teachers held about themselves as teachers deciding the curriculum in their day-to-day work.

... many teachers cling to a picture where implementing the curriculum is akin to travelling quickly down a smooth highway towards the ideals of their profession.

Diagram 1 - curriculum implementation as travelling along a highway

Here we see a teacher pushing her barrow, full of professional knowledge, along a highway towards ideals. The teacher pushes that barrow down that smooth road and it takes hardly any time at all to reach the ideal, the rainbow where beautiful things happen as teachers, parents and children work together.

Unfortunately, if the journey is not so smooth teachers begin to blame themselves, to worry whether they pumped up the tyre on the wheelbarrow, whether they don't really know all that professional knowledge well enough. But then, when it gets to be bumpy year after year teachers begin to feel defensive and then angry about 'barriers' which prevent them from doing their job in the way they know "best".

Diagram 2 - insurmountable barriers

This is when we begin to tell 'they won't let me' stories ...

The teachers who had volunteered for this study, did not talk about *constraints* or *in surmountable barriers* but about *dilemmas*. It was evident that they understood their work to be mostly about transactions, not just negotiating about learning with children but negotiating about all aspects of the process of establishing a curriculum in the places where they worked.

These were experienced teachers of young children, teachers with a long-term interest in curriculum which they considered to be 'child-responsive'. They talked about children having choice, about teachers responding sensitively to individuals and about establishing responsive communities where everyone respected and cared for one another. As we reflected on what it was that they felt was central to their notion of being responsive, we all agreed that it was not just about using hands-on resources, allowing children to move about and to talk while learning.

They said it was sad that so many teachers who called themselves 'child-centred' seemed to be satisfied with these surface features. They preferred to think of themselves as 'child-responsive', for that signified the importance they attached to establishing a community where everyone was valued, where everyone learned that they had special talents.

The curriculum implementation process for these teachers was a matter of negotiating, of working hard to establish practices they valued and wanted others to value too.

Diagram 3 - Creating pathways guided by ideals

Here is the same teacher, the same wheelbarrow and the same ideals. But the smooth path is gone and so have the barriers. Boulders are spread across a field, a place located in time as well as in physical space, and, in social and cultural milieu. Implementing the curriculum is a matter of creating a path, with that wheelbarrow full of knowledge, finding ways around boulders. Knowledge about the dynamics of creating a personal path while interacting and acting within ongoing social rules, was considered very important curriculum knowledge for these teachers.

Dilemmas in deciding which way to go when encountering a boulder were what motivated the teachers to gather together to talk. They wanted to swap tales about dilemma situations, listening to one another's descriptions of the history, the various threads in the here and now, worries about possible consequences which made it so complex to decide action. When we reflected on what might be gained from telling all the gory details, the teachers said that without that detail they couldn't understand the dilemma. Hearing the detail enabled them to learn vicariously. ...

... and, what about the rainbow sitting outside the field? These teachers found it amusing to propose what seemed, in their cultural milieu, to be a little shocking. That is, that ideals, the rainbows shining in the distance, are never enacted, teachers don't reproduce those nice, neat idealised practices described in books or at seminars. It is not a matter of picking up good ideas that someone else has thought up and putting them down somewhere else. Ideals are aspirations which keep us always striving to do even better. But it is beyond mortals - even beyond early childhood teachers - to enact ideals.

> These teachers liked to see the rainbow outside the field where they worked, and to have goals which shifted about as they assessed possibilities in the here and now, these children, this community and myself this year. They talked about 'leapfrogging' at the end of each month, of seeing where they got to before deciding where to go next.
>
> Hence it was necessary to leave room to change direction, to find an alternative pathway, then move the goal to keep it in line with that ideal shining in the distance, to ensure that the way was not lost.
>
> As we played with our barrow metaphor, we thought of the wheel as the part in teachers' practical knowledge which is orientated to action. The wheel is in contact with the field, it comes into collision with boulders and it is the means by which teachers find a way around dilemmas. We linked this idea of the wheel driving action with Yinger's (1987, p.301) notion of teachers chunking knowledge to cope with the complexities of practical decision making, and with the notion of teacher images which was so well described in the works of Freema Elbaz in 1983 and Jean Clandinin in 1986 ...
>
> (end of extract from the paper presented with practitioner groups).

In deliberations with Kate and Wendy the construct of image helped in teasing out of seemingly trivial perceptions of experience, social knowledge about how to act towards structural regularities in the work place. As we learned more about how this social knowledge was woven into images we found we were gaining insight into how it happened that teachers could share ideals and identify similar situations where dilemmas arose yet would adopt different approaches for managing dilemmas.

For Kate and Wendy these insights into their personal practical knowledge were empowering. They reported that they were better able to understand why it was that they became so emotional involved in deciding dilemmas, because so much of themselves as persons and as professionals was woven into images activated when dilemmas had to be faced. They reported that increasing awareness of images provided a rich basis for reflection in the quest for new possibilities in pursuing their goal of gaining acceptance of valued practices.

Using Images to Manage Dilemmas

As data accumulated it was evident that four intersections of teacher ideals and work place structures were particularly problematic for these teachers. These intersections are given labels drawn from our discourse, for these are terms which signify something of how the teachers perceived themselves in their worlds of work.

Interruptions

Many teachers complain about the problem of interruptions. Through our indepth study of situations where interruptions were particularly troublesome for Kate and Wendy we began to see a pattern where the typical school culture of authority meant that "the staff" were expected to be subordinates in relationships with a superordinate, "the boss", just as students were expected to be in subordinate relationships with teachers. This was a structural regularity (a boulder) in place in most schools within the school system. It was a routinised relationship worked out under earlier, now superceded, policies of the school system but still accepted by most teachers socialised into school cultures. Given the prevailing culture of authority, the images the teachers held influenced how they orientated action, but did not automatically lead to the consequences they desired.

When Kate began the school year in a new teaching situation, she used her image of *self as a professional equal* to sense what needed to be done to achieve the acceptance that would enable her to use practices she valued. Like all the teachers in this study who were in their first year in a new teaching situation, Kate was alert to quite subtle indicators of the power relationships in place in the work place. She listened intently, seeking to understand the gestures and the silences as well as the verbal components of interaction in school meetings and other staff routines for living in this school.

At the end of a planning session I attended as observer, Kate remarked that she found these meeting emotionally exhausting. We reflected on this and came to the conclusion that she injected enormous amounts of energy into monitoring what happened as she made tentative probes to find out what the immediate consequences were to acting assertively towards authority figures in the school. As the months progressed she gradually built up a picture of what she needed to do if she was to succeed in her bid for relationships where she was recognised as a professional equal.

Kate's sense of self as a professional equal, however, resulted in many occasions where she felt uncertain, even angry, for while she assessed herself as acting assertively, some with power in the school culture of authority left her with an impression that they thought she acted aggressively. She turned to colleagues outside the school situation to re-view experience, checking that she was not violating anyone else's rights and searching out new possibilities for establishing relationships of equality within this work situation.

Wendy brought to her new teaching situation images of self as a *caring person* and of *teaching as team work*. Living within the school culture of authority was very new to her. Her previous teaching experience was in preschools, where a different authority structure had evolved within a separate division of the system. Images in her practical knowledge had not been constructed to deal with situations like this so every situation where Wendy expressed a feeling of "interruption" seemed to be one where she felt she had "no knowledge" immediately available to avoid reacting to the edicts of "authorities". It took time, she discovered, to gain knowledge which would help her discern situations where she might inadvertently become a subordinate and thus yet again find an "interruption" cutting across her efforts to achieve a flow in learning, a sense of shared enthusiasm and team work in the learning program.

Through her reflective conversations with her colleagues she began to identify the need to develop assertiveness strategies so as to avoid interruption without becoming involved in power struggles about who should be the subordinate and who the superordinate. She wanted to achieve power relationships based on caring and shared enthusiasm with children as well as with adults, something like Giddens' notion of the "dialectic of control" (1984, p.16).

Giddens' social theory, in contrast to theories which treat power as a property of either the individual or the society, proposes that power resides in the process of structuration, the moment by moment intersections where social structures are constituted and reconstituted in everyday life. Agents taking part in this structuration process bring resources which assist them to either reproduce existing relations or produce alternatives. Wendy's interest in learning assertiveness strategies could be seen as recognition that she needed resources which enabled her to achieve relationships of interdependency, mutual respect and an obligation to support one other. Her images of *self as caring* and *teaching as team work* could be seen in action, implicated in her efforts to find ways to locate herself in relationships where she was a member of a team.

Late in the year the teacher group reacted to my interpretations of why "interruptions" constituted such a frustrating aspect of their efforts to establish child-responsive

classrooms, with an impassioned discussion of gender issues. This discussion revealed anger about the persistence of incidents where they were assumed to be subordinates within professional relationships. Anger was less evident in the narratives constructed with Kate and Wendy, for here we focused our attention on the deliberative ways in which individual teachers seek to establish responsive relationships, even in the face of an expectation that they should act as subordinates.

But in the group meetings we confronted the fact that the teachers collaborating in this inquiry were women members of "staff" who were assigned duties by male "bosses". In the school system where they worked, as is the case in most modern public school systems, there are high proportions of males who compete for and achieve high status administrative positions and high proportions of females who choose to pursue careers as teachers of young children (Apple, 1987). Whatever the structural patterns might be that predispose men and women to make these choices, the women in this study were actively pursuing a career they considered they had chosen. At the time of the investigation, they were initiators of classroom curriculum improvements which promoted deeply held values about quality of life and beliefs about effective teaching and learning.

These women chose to pursue innovatory practices which put them out of step with conventional ways of relating with administrators and out of step with a convention in their society that women should fit in and support the initiatives of others. Unfortunately, these two structural features of the teacher's world of work combined in myriads of incidents which resulted in them having to devote an enormous amount of time and effort if they were to succeed in maintaining the alternative work relationships they sought. The teachers were able to establish and maintain something of the dialectic where teachers worked *with* administrators (in contrast to under their direction) and thus were able to establish the conditions where they could work *with* children in their classrooms. Yet dilemma situations occurred with monotonous regularity, each involving yet another collision in expectations where care was needed to avoid conforming with the structured relationships where administrators are autonomous and teachers are dependent, males are leaders and females are "nice".

Being different

So many of our conversations about classroom dilemmas indicated that teacher thinking involved movement between the past, the present situation, the wider milieu in which current action occurred, and visions for the future. This caution in deciding the degree of difference which would be tolerated in their world of work could be understood as part of the process of juggling competing imperatives while holding tenaciously to goals which could be so easily subverted. It was not enough, they thought, to have their will prevail in the short term, if children might later suffer unintended consequences.

Delving into why the teachers were so cautious brought into focus a strong moral component in practical knowledge that informed their efforts to be child-responsive. The images orientating how they managed dilemmas were heavily laden with moral imperatives, as is indicated in this extract from a tale Kate told about an unpleasant consequence of involvement in innovation some five years previously.

> Kate: The two teachers who taught the children in the following year were highly traditional and they'd gone to the principal and said there were 18 out of 30 kids who couldn't read at all. At a meeting the principal more or less sided with them, and we started to think 'well have we done the wrong thing by the children?' The principal was panicking. No blame to anyone but ... you know. Anyway we claimed those kids could read. What was more frustrating was we'd taken the kids we thought were at risk and put them into this other class that was specially designed for kids with reading

> and other problems as well. Anyhow (the teacher of the special class) said, 'Well look I've supposedly got the slowest kids from that group and all mine can read'. It did blow up...there was a lot of ill feeling about it and then ... my teaching partner, she got really depressed about it. She said she felt like hiding. I think ... a lot of people felt threatened by the whole language and they felt threatened by the discipline.
>
> Gail: Were the parents involved?
>
> Kate: No they were very quiet. It was the teachers. The whole thing was very unpleasant ...and then the teacher from the [Department of Education] Reading Centre came up and what she said agreed with what the year one teachers were trying to do and he (the principal) agreed with her!
>
> Gail: Has this experience influenced your approach now?
>
> Kate: Oh yes. I'm a bit more cautious; going back more to not being prepared to give up some of the umm .. not only that but what other people have said .. you know, the slower kids are disadvantaged and this and that. I think they are the ones that often are the ones you worry about.

Kate's image of *communities where everyone was valued* and Wendy's image of *teaching as team work* were deeply embedded constellations of meaning orientating much of the valuing, emotionality and aesthetic judgements of these two teachers. Images which indicate a similar value for the quality of relationships and for community living in the classroom, could be noted in the work of Clandinin (1986) and in other studies where teachers have become involved in reflective, collaborative research into their work with groups of young learners (Yonemura, 1986; Ayers, 1989; McLean, 1991).

The teachers could be understood as having critical awareness of the circumstances in which they worked and in which children lived their lives. They acted within an ethical consideration for the quality of the whole, the ways in which each individual related with their community not just within the classroom routines they established. Their images helped them remain cognizant of other complex wholes, the present leading into a future where there could be unintended and undesirable consequences if they moved beyond what stakeholders in the present could accept.

It meant understanding other stakeholders in their world of work and accepting that while their values were bound into particular views on good practice, these views could not and should not be *imposed* on others. Gaining acceptance for practices they valued might be slow and unspectacular but they strived to do it in ways they believed to be just, fair - and practical. Long-term success was their goal.

Order in classrooms or control over the classroom

Many of the dilemmas facing the group of teachers involved competing views on appropriate routines for achieving orderly classrooms. The ideals they strived for, and the images orientating their action, led them to favour routines involving choice and an expectation that everyone worked within a supportive community.

In Wendy's case, these competing imperatives involved finding ways to maintain an orderly classroom within the teaching space she shared with two other teachers and 56 five to six year old children. In her previous experience, as a preschool teacher, she had seldom had difficulty establishing a learning environment which was "orderly" in the sense that children were able to pursue personal learning interests within relationships of relative harmony among the group. In the new teaching situation it seemed to be extremely difficult to establish these routines.

It was generally accepted in her new teaching situation that achieving order required overt control over learners and the imposition of rules, especially for group behaviour. As the year progressed, Wendy became increasingly anxious, because she felt neither capable of imposing the institutionalised rules for group behaviour nor comfortable in attempting to do so. Her efforts to bring her image of *teaching as team work*, of working *with* children, came into direct collision with the routines for living in this school.

This collision was most starkly obvious to the observer whenever Wendy took responsibility for the whole group at the beginning of the afternoon activity session. Wendy had initiated a new approach to teaching in the afternoon and had responsibility for getting the session underway. When children came in after the bell they sat on the carpet for a few minutes of "relaxation", sometimes listening to music in the transition from the lunch time vigorous play to working on tasks set for the afternoon. Wendy usually attended to individual children as the group assembled and her teaching partners, Mary and Leigh, attended to last minute organisation for the session. When Wendy sat on her chair ready to begin the group session, Mary and Leigh sat or stood at the back of the group.

In the early months it was evident that Wendy was bringing all the skills she had acquired in her preschool teaching to bear on her efforts to achieve an orderly, yet responsive, group. She repeatedly and deliberatively sought to engage children's interest through a combination of listening with interest to children's comments, seeking to establish a group discussion based on the interests she thought were emerging in the group and seeking to build excited anticipation for the afternoon activities. She ignored the fairly quiet wriggling and poking among this large group of children, concentrating on those who were beginning to respond, showing interest in what they had to say.

But Mary and Leigh were not so prepared to ignore these movements which they perceived to be lack of attention. They had internalised the school rule that children should "sit, look and listen" when in group situations and did not appear to recognise that Wendy was aiming for a different style of group interaction. Unfortunately, in their efforts to support Wendy, the two teachers managed to undermine her efforts to introduce a different group work relationship. Intruding into Wendy's efforts to engage children's interest could be heard whispers from the other teachers calling on a particular child to "attend", sometimes a sharp rebuke to a child from Leigh and occasionally a roar of anger about "rude children" from Mary.

> (Selection from notes 27 August 2.00 p.m.)
> Wendy: The theme we are starting is about gardens. Yes Amy it is about plants and yes Roger leaves are part of it. I would have asked you Mark but you called out. Lots of things about gardens aren't there? ... This is an activity using seeds and glue. See you shake the pine cones and seeds fall out. There did you see that one? Such a tiny seed for such a big tree. ...
>
> Leigh: Boys and girls what's the matter did you forget your manners over the weekend? Sit up nicely and look at Ms Ess. Everyone of you look at Ms Ess' face, you put your eyes on her face.

Over the months Wendy began to vacillate between demonstrating she could teach in the traditional way and pursuing her goal of gaining acceptance from the children (if not from her teaching partners) for a style of teaching built on working together on shared interests. Unfortunately the contradictory styles of the three teachers and the vigorously promoted school rule "sit, look and listen" continued to be a disruptive element.

When we reflected in the group meetings on why dilemmas arose about what constituted an orderly room the term "control" often entered into our deliberations. In the meetings teachers sometimes talked of "having" control and "giving" control as we struggled to describe what it was we all valued and each one was striving towards. Yet none of us felt comfortable about describing the routines established to provide order as something to do with teachers or learners "having" control. It was as if we all knew, in a non-discursive way, that using the language of control inevitably implied relationships of domination and subordination, either the teacher "in control" or the children "in control", either the person "controlled" or the person "autonomous".

The teachers participating in this inquiry envisaged relationships characterised by shared enthusiasms and respect for difference. They did not aspire towards control over learners. Nor did they expect to relinquish an important role in the teaching/learning process. With the research focus on intersections where teacher intent was expressed in the routines that learners encountered, it became clear that the notion of "control" by one or the other was not particularly useful in trying to understand classroom dynamics. These teachers sought to establish an orderly environment which was predictable, where shared meanings gave coherence and direction in the personal construction of knowledge. When we delved more deeply into the source of dilemmas it was seldom issues about who had control which were at the centre, rather it was issues associated with establishing learner/teacher relationships where personal autonomy came about through working within routinised relationships of trust and connectedness, where there were spaces for each child to follow a personal learning path.

As we constructed narratives of experience through our collaborative search for new understandings, the researcher role included searching for connections with the literature on teachers' curriculum work, with especial attention to how others understood and talked about classroom order. I revisited a sociological literature where the construct of social control was used in analysing teacher knowledge and their work in classrooms. "Control" in this literature was very often associated with an assumption that teachers were active contributers to the dominant and dominating structures of schooling and would (in some theories, "should") inevitably control learners. A related assumption was that neither teachers nor learners have the power to change these structured relationships of domination and subjugation. Criticism of child-centred education tended to revolve around the assumption that teachers could and should control learner behaviour and the learning process. In an analysis of reactions to the notion of pupil autonomy Hargreaves (1977) notes that criticisms of child-centred curriculum practices ranged from an assumption that, educational ideologies which valued pupil autonomy implied lack of control in the educational process, to those arguing that beneath the slogans of "child-centred" and "pupil autonomy" existed school routines which inevitably controlled what children learned. It appeared that the theorists contributing to the debate could envisage no alternatives to classrooms where children were either controlled or autonomous, having control or under control.

Although classroom studies of the 1980s have acknowledged a more complex set of dynamics in achieving classroom order (Berlak and Berlak, 1987; Alexander, 1988), it is still the case that few teacher voices are heard in the debates. The assumption that "control" provides the most useful construct for understanding order in classrooms remains largely unchallenged. Thus when practitioners seeking to be learner responsive find it necessary to justify action within a language which gives central place to "control", their statements appear ambiguous. This effort to explain order, offered by an advocate of progressive education, captures the problem.

> The teacher, while not appearing to will be in control, not in a domineering way but by quietly guiding and stretching and leading in.
>
> Hargreaves 1977, p.589

Many of the early childhood teachers I had come to know would have no difficulty in picturing the transactions implied in this statement, even though the use of the language of control meant trying to explain a dialectic, using terms which implied a one-way process. The statement holds the same tensions, the same potential for ambiguity, as attempts within our collaborative efforts, to use the language of having and giving control to explain dilemmas associated with achieving orderly classrooms.

Shared ownership in the learning process

Kate and Wendy worked to bring about child-responsive classrooms, but experienced difficulty in explaining alternatives to the familiar instructional mode of teaching, where children are directed along a learning path decided by teachers, schools and/or external curriculum developers. Direct instruction to the whole class, small group or individual was the teaching mode most stakeholders with an interest in their classroom work knew about and accepted. The teachers reported finding it difficult to explain to these stakeholders a teaching approach where they believed they could not and should not control the learning process, but where they could and should provide inspiration, direction, challenge and support as learners negotiated their own learning paths.

This was evident when Wendy introduced a routine she called "free choice". Her teaching partners, Mary and Leigh, expressed support for the initiative but Wendy became frustrated and bewildered when they appeared to opt out of the transactional teaching/learning relationships she understood to be associated with using that routine.

> Wendy: How can I explain it. The free choice is .. I want it to be something basic, us having the kids doing a free choice time is a basis of their continuing on with their skills. But it's turning into a 'oh we don't know what we are doing this afternoon, you can have free choice'. And as much as they are still doing free choice, the basis behind it isn't right. And that's what it's become more and more. It's 'oh we don't want to plan any activities today, let's do free choice'. And it's a cop out doing it that way, because it's not, you are not really going into it with the right motives.
>
> Gail: And it's not responsive to kids' interests?
>
> Wendy: No, it's not. It's 'they can go'. The kids love the work, they really enjoy it. But they are not often getting the support when they need it. And they are not being extended while they are doing it so it becomes rather futile.
>
> Gail: So it's very frustrating then?
>
> Wendy: Yes, we are doing it, but more and more I'm coming to realise, I think when we do it, sometimes it's either (a) there is nothing else to do, or (b) it's easier just to go along with Wendy.

It seemed that despite so many attempts by educators imbued with progressive philosophies to articulate alternatives to direct instruction (Eisner, 1979), teaching actions which aim to support, nurture and enter as partner in the learning process are very difficult concepts to grasp without becoming actively involved in transactional relationships.

Dilemmas associated with ownership in the learning process were the major source of worry for Kate. She saw her central dilemma as difficulty in deciding her teaching role when she encouraged children to take responsibility for their own learning. She was working to extend use of an image associated with relatively recent changes in her practices, her image of *children making meaning*, and as this image was activated she

found herself questioning many teaching practices she had formerly found very effective. In her efforts to change curriculum practices to encourage children to make meaning in personalised ways, Kate drew on theories which emphasised developmental processes, often using terms such as "natural" learning processes. Yet she felt uncomfortable about the idea that a process such as "becoming a reader" was a "natural" process where teachers merely provided the conditions for learning. She did not accept that teaching was a simply transmission process, one-way instruction, but she did not find the idea that she was peripheral to the learning process fitted well either with what she knew in practice. Our numerous discussions about suitable balances between rote learning and open-ended challenges was one aspect of this ongoing dilemma. Kate was seeking new understandings of how she might locate herself in the ongoing learning process when she wanted children to take that kind of responsibility.

Attempts to tease out the dimensions of this dilemma were both invigorating and challenging for Kate. Our conversations indicated she was bringing what she knew about the social conditions of action into deliberations about the details of teaching, an aspect of teachers' work which is often assumed to be isolated from the wider social context. Kate brought into our deliberations awareness that the wider milieu in which classroom curriculum is situated can lead to unintended consequences in the micro world of the school. She was concerned that the apparent backlash occurring in another Australian state after a decade when "whole language" approaches had been widely promoted, might be the forerunner to a similar backlash among parents of children in her class. She worried about unintended consequences for slower learners if she altered the balance between personal choice and routines involving steady repetitive practice. Her past experience indicated that such children gained basic skills through steady, repetitive practice even if others were merely marking time when these routines were in use. Her own experiences in her first years at school had left so many painful feelings associated with failing to learn that she was not willing to create situations where young learners she taught were in any danger of similar experiences.

After some months of reflective conversations about why she faced so many dilemmas in this areas, Kate decided that terms such as "natural", like those expressions "taking control" and "giving control", did not express how she perceived herself as teacher in the children's learning. Late in the year she wrote in her diary that she now perceived herself to be involved in "sharing responsibility" for the children's learning. It seemed that being able to re-view experience through reflective conversations about dilemmas helped Kate gain insight into what she knew in her practical consciousness. As she recorded in her diary near the end of our year of deliberations:

> I used to say I want children to take responsibility for their own learning. Over the year I've changed that to the idea of "shared responsibility."

As a result of studying her own images through our collaboration she now felt better able to express what she knew in an embodied sense, through her emotions and her actions. She remained aware though, that so many of the stakeholders in her world of work might have considerable difficulty understanding what this meant in everyday teaching and learning relationships.

Conclusion

The narratives emerging through collaboration with this group of teachers support some assumptions and concerns basic to Giddens'(1984) social theory, though the practitioners involved saw very little utility in the propositional language Giddens and others use to express their elegant theories. Giddens claims that social research should result in increased understanding of how the individual's sense of personal agency is implicated, not only in situations where action merely reproduces existing structures, but also in situations where new and better social structures take their place. The teachers were capable of drawing on quite complex knowledge about the social

circumstances in which they acted. It was not merely the uncovering of this social knowledgeability which was of significance in this study, but the tracing of how this knowledge enters in images, and thus is drawn up into action when particular types of situations arise. In other words, it was not propositions about society and social action, the type of knowledge typically gained through academic study, that teachers drew upon in the work place. It was social knowledge caught up in images, particularly images of self as person and self as teacher, which became implicated in agency, in efforts to gain acceptance for difference.

This study also supports the findings of Johnston's 1989 study of secondary school teachers who had successfully pursued curriculum diversification. Johnston found that working with teachers, reflecting on images associated with their efforts to gain acceptance for new courses led to important insights into what teachers need to know to be able to gain acceptance for valued curriculum practices. The study highlighted the person, the ways images of self enter into perceptions of what is possible within the work milieu.

As personalised narratives were constructed with Kate and Wendy each teacher found much to reflect on as we began picturing how social knowledge (derived from personal experience with very, very few threads from formal theory) was woven into images of self as person and self as teacher. The two teachers found it illuminating and empowering to begin understanding the images they brought to decisions made about how to act when dilemmas arose. In the group meetings, their colleagues were most interested when Kate or Wendy talked about this way of understanding action. All teachers taking part in the group meetings expressed satisfaction with this way of explaining why it was that a group could hold similar ideals and share similar dilemmas, yet act towards dilemmas in such personalised ways.

When these teachers began bringing what they knew into our discourse, a quite different genre from discourse styles of academics came into use. Any attempts by this researcher to formulate what we were surfacing into propositional forms tended to silence them. If I produced written notes which were meant to encapsulate our narratives into something with the measured tones of formal theory the teachers accepted this as an accurate interpretation but they never used any of the propositions into our reflective conversations. When I probed into why this was occuring they commented that they regarded this style of reporting as part of my agenda not theirs.

Yet our "boulder story", while containing quite a number of elements introduced by the researcher and a relatively abstract representation of their collective experience, was understood as part of our shared agenda. It was the basis for much of our shared understanding about the dilemmas we examined. When told to other practitioners it invited additional reflective conversations about dilemmas of practice and the social knowledge teachers needed to manage dilemmas.

It could be that seeking insight into social knowledge as it is used in practice requires sustained and sensitive attention to the patterns of meaning practitioners use. Perhaps lack of attention to practitioner's language patterns in the past is part of the reason why so many elegant social theories are generated and so many practitioners find them irrelevant to their work. Perhaps it is time to reflect again on Mills' warning that grand theory may empty concepts of clear empirical reference with the result that "in the trans-historical world you are building, you will be quite alone." (1959, p.138)

Working collaboratively with teachers will seldom result in the grand theories sought be some curriculum theorists. More likely will be theories which maintain strong connections with the lived experiences of practitioners and thus enhance efforts to engage in reflexive analysis of that experience. These theories may also be more interesting than grand theory if those collaborating with teachers listen for the cadences, the forms, the metaphor, humour, visual representation and ironic commentary which

appear to be so necessary for capturing the complexities of the curriculum work undertaken by teachers.

Building the metaphor of travel into a narrative about teachers' work, has encouraged practitioners to picture themselves in their relationships with their world of work. It has also assisted them to attend more carefully to recurring dilemma and to how they activate knowledge in situations where dilemmas must be managed. Particularly important in illuminating the knowledge used to gain acceptance for valued practices was the finding that knowledge about how to act in social situations is caught up in images. We found it interesting, also, that these images caught up very few threads from formal social theory.

These are significant findings for those designing teacher education courses. Little attention is currently given to understanding what student-teachers need to know about making curriculum decisions within the social contexts of work. This study indicates that they will draw on experiential knowledge which is largely held at an intuitive or tacit level of consciousness. The study also indicates that teachers can become more aware of how this knowledge is implicated in their curriculum decision making. Teaching methods which build on the collaborative research methods used in this study may provide a more effective approach to helping every teacher become much more aware of the social knowledge they now hold and how that knowledge enters into images of self in social situations. Once personal awareness is aroused, it is possible for the individual to begin the task of enhancing, or perhaps reconstructing, these images so their ability to make good curriculum decisions is constantly enhanced.

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